



tips to support healthy choices (2-4 years)

You are an important role model for your child. Your child will watch what you eat, how much you exercise, how much screen-time you use and how you look after yourself.

Children who grow up in families that enjoy a healthy lifestyle are more likely to make their own healthy choices as they get older.

Physical activity

Toddlers and preschoolers need plenty of time to just run around and play.

Backyards, Kindy and school playgrounds, nature play spaces, playgroups, parks, trails and the beach are all great places for supervised play for children of this age.

It is recommended that toddlers and preschoolers are physically active for at least 3 hours every day. This can be spread throughout the day.

Here are some ideas for **keeping physical activity fun**:

- Use a large, soft ball to practise catching, throwing, hitting, bouncing and kicking.
- Play different music, or make sounds with your voice or instruments, to encourage dancing and a sense of rhythm.
- Teach your child to ride a scooter or tricycle.
- Play with push toys like trucks, doll prams and toy lawn mowers.
- Leave the car at home and walk to local places like the library, park or shops.
- Find an active play buddy for your child to have regular play dates with.
- Include your child in everyday physical tasks like helping with the gardening, unpacking shopping or tidying up play spaces.



Screen time

Screen time is the time spent watching TV or DVDs, using computers, playing video or hand-held computer games, or using tablets or smartphones. There are benefits and risks to using these devices, so a healthy family lifestyle includes limits on daily screen time.

It is recommended that children aged 2 to 5 have no more than 1 hour of screen time each day.

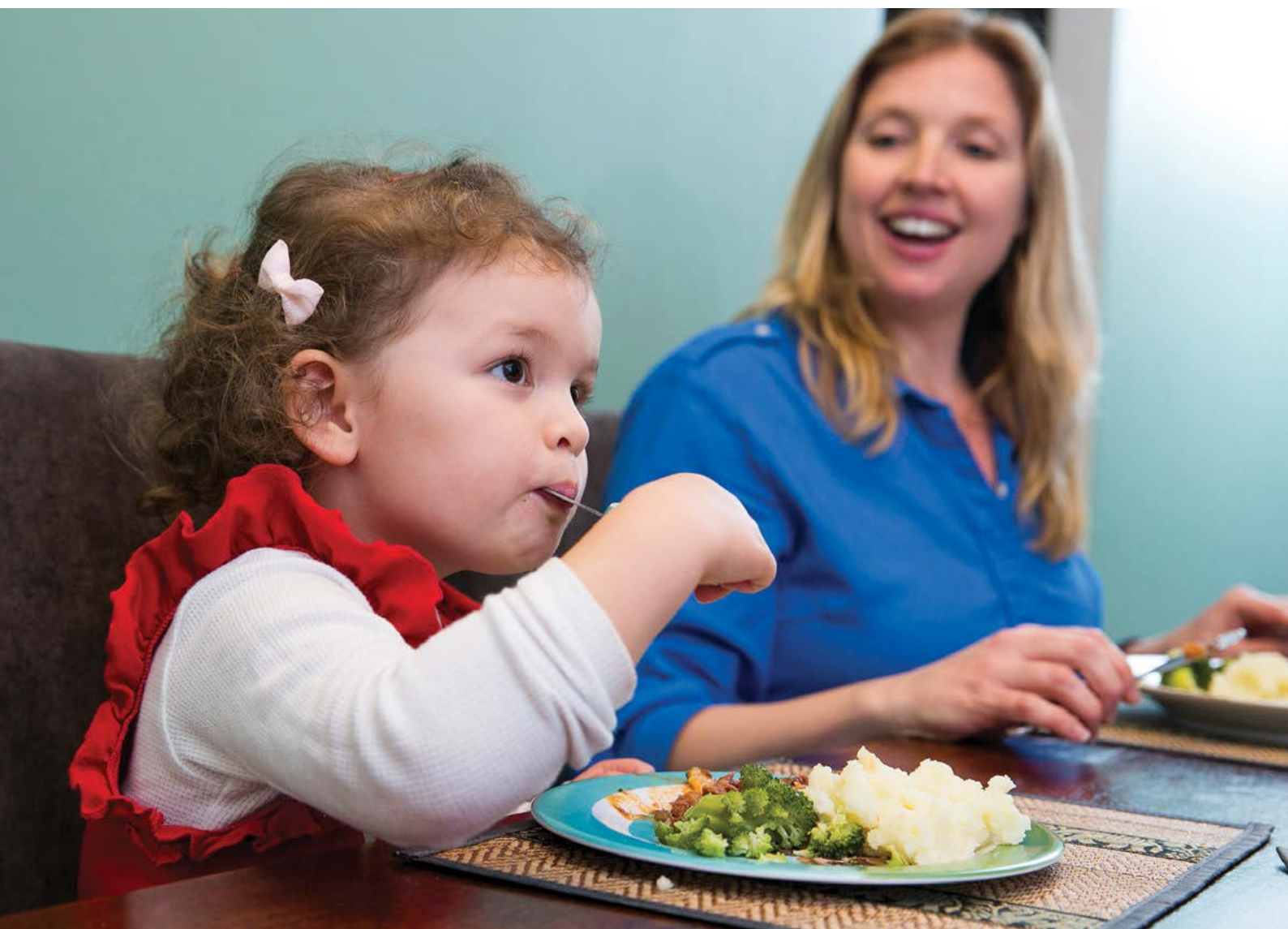
It is recommended that children under 2 years have no screen time at all except for video-chatting with long-distant family and friends.

- Remove all sources of screen time from your child's bedroom, including TVs, tablets, computers and phones.
- Use a timer or an alarm clock to keep track of how much time your child spends on screen time.
- Try to have at least one full day every week where your family doesn't use screens.
- Try to limit time spent being inactive to no more than 1 hour at a time, even if not screen based.

Healthy eating

Healthy eating habits start early and set children up for life. Make healthy eating an everyday priority that becomes a family lifestyle.

- Offer 3 main meals and 2 or 3 healthy snacks for your child each day.
- Refer to the attached **Australian Guide to Healthy Eating** for the types of food to offer, standard serving sizes, and the right number of serves for your child.
 - Tear it off and keep it as a handy reference as your child grows.
- Offer water to drink. Avoid sugary drinks (including fruit juice).
- Limit treats that are high in sugar, fat or salt. These should only be eaten occasionally and in small amounts.





Establish healthy eating patterns

Children sense how much food their bodies need and eat enough to match this. But children lose this natural ability if encouraged to over-eat or finish all the food on their plate.

In the first 12 months, babies grow very fast. As toddlers aren't growing as quickly, their appetites often drop - this is normal. They just aren't as hungry because they aren't growing as quickly!

- Help your child to learn about their body's hunger cues.
 - As the parent, your role is to decide **which** food to offer your child, and **when** and **where** to offer it.
 - Your child's role is to decide **whether** they eat, **what** they eat and **how much** they eat.
- Eat meals together at a table, with the TV and other screens turned off.
- Set-up a regular mealtime routine, and remember breakfast is important!
- Fight boredom! If your child asks for food or milk after a meal or snack, they may just need help finding something to do, rather than more food!
- Identify ways to reward your child that don't include food, and try to avoid food as a comfort for your child.
- Be sure to model the healthy eating habits you want your child to develop.

Sleep

Around this age, your child's sleep patterns may be changing. A well-rested child will have more energy to play and learn. Poor quality sleep is also linked with being overweight.

Children this age need 10 to 12 hours sleep a night.

Many 2 year olds can do with an hour or 2 of rest or sleep in the middle of the day as well.

A consistent bedtime routine will help prepare your child for sleep. It's important to keep the routine consistent on weekends as well as during the week, when possible.

- A bedtime routine might include brushing teeth, a bath, quiet time (to read a book or tell a story) and into bed with a kiss goodnight.
- It's best to avoid screen time in the 90 minutes before bedtime. Watching screens makes it more difficult for children to fall asleep and reduces overall sleep time.
- Good sleep is important for the whole family!

Growth

Weight loss is not usually needed for a child who is above the healthy weight range. It is better to help children develop healthy habits so that they can 'grow into' their weight.

Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

This guide shows the proportion of the **five food groups** we should all eat daily. Enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from these **five food groups** every day. Drink plenty of water.



Use **small amounts**



Only **sometimes** and in **small amounts**





More information

The following websites can provide you with more information and ideas on how to make a healthy lifestyle a fun and regular part of your family's life!

- **Raising Children Network**
great ideas about healthy eating, physical activity, weight concerns, screen time, sleep and much more
 - raisingchildren.net.au
- **Eat for Health**
healthy eating guide, help in understanding labels, recipes and more
 - eatforhealth.gov.au
- **Livelifter**
helps families achieve healthier lifestyles
 - livelifter.com.au
- **Nature Play WA**
great ideas for outdoors activities
 - natureplaywa.org.au
- **Active Living**
information and ideas for the whole family
 - heartfoundation.org.au

Additional support

- **Food Sensations**
a 4-session course about healthy eating, and buying and preparing healthy foods for the family.
 - healthyfoodforall.com.au
- **Triple P**
practical, effective ways to manage common parenting issues
 - healthywa.wa.gov.au/parentgroups
- A **dietitian** can assist with individual dietary advice and meal plans.
 - daa.asn.au to find a local Accredited Practising Dietitian
- Your **family doctor** may also offer growth monitoring and support.
- Your **child health nurse**

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

This publication is provided for general education and information purposes. Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.